

1. Introduction

As a supervisor and Director of the Masters of Arts in Supervisory Practice programme at Milltown Institute, Dublin I have come to understand the importance of supervision as an essential part of personal and professional development. Critical reflection, praxis and transformational learning are key elements characterising supervisory practice in post-modern cultures. Supervision is a very important means of taking care of oneself in the midst of the demands of ministry.

Defining supervision has been a source of much debate for many years. Frances Ward defines supervision as 'a space in which mutual learning occurs, a space of interaction and dialogue, a space where identities are formed and transformed, a space of interplay, and of experimentation'.¹ Supervision enables us to awaken to the complex web of relationships, including the hidden presence of God. Praxis, when thought and action meet to produce change, can be transformational and revelatory.²

2. Background

Milltown Institute offers an innovative *Higher Diploma and Masters of Arts in Supervisory Practice*. The primary principle informing this two year training in supervision is the application of supervision theory and praxis to clinical, pastoral and spiritual contexts of human care and engagement.

The Higher Diploma is designed to provide the theoretical, ethical, pastoral and spiritual foundations for the practice of supervision in various settings. The MA builds on these foundations by providing practical training in supervisory skills and the opportunity to work with supervisees. Together these programmes will enable those in demanding professional helping relationships to identify and articulate a personal philosophy of supervision.

Origins and Aims of SAI

In June 2005, inspired by the first group of graduates from the Milltown Supervisory Practice programme, a representative group of supervisor's met in UCD, Dublin in response to a felt need to establish an association for cross professional supervision in Ireland. The aims of this group were to:

- Establish a self governing professional organisation, which promotes a Code of Ethics and Standards amongst its members
- Develop high standards of practice amongst its members who are supervisors and trainers
- Promote an inclusive, adult educational model of supervisory practice across contexts

One year later, in May 2006, SAI was officially launched by *Dr Margaret Benefiel*. In November 2006 members of Accord, IACP, Coaching and supervisors from training Institutes such as All Hallows College, Trinity College, Milltown Institute and PCI College Dublin to name but a few attended the inaugural conference led by *Professor Michael Carroll*. The final event of the year, a Masterclass facilitated by *Brigid Proctor*, was a great opportunity to share experiences in the field of supervision and cross professional networking. Overall SAI has had a very positive start and role in the helping profession.

Significance

SAI is an important and growing organisation both in vision and in number. As a national community of learners it aims to:

- Raise public awareness of the benefits of supervision
- Promote cross professional supervision

- Respond to ongoing developmental needs and research within the field of supervisory practice through support, networking, workshops, conferences and publications

Through membership of ANSE, SAI are partners in an EU-Programme, the *Leonardo Learning Partnership*, which seeks to support cooperation, mobility and exchange between supervisors, trainers and organisations in Europe.

According to Robert Wicks modern spiritual ministry can be dangerous.³ Maintaining physical and psycho-spiritual wellness through a consistent commitment to a discipline of self-care is both an ethical responsibility and a professional and a spiritual challenge.

Compassion fatigue is not unknown. Supervision is an important discipline of self care and an essential part of personal and professional development for anyone engaged in the helping professions.

For further information about SAI or the Master of Arts in Supervisory Practice contact:
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NOTES

¹ Francis Ward, *Lifelong Learning: Theological Education and Supervision* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 88.

² Thomas St. James O'Connell, *Clinical Pastoral Supervision and the Theology of Charles Gerkin* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998).

³ Wicks, R. J., 'The Stress of Spiritual Ministry: Practical Suggestions on Avoiding Unnecessary Distress,' in *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers* (Vol.1) (N J: Paulist Press, 1995), 249-258.

A SUPERVISOR'S TESTIMONY

For those working in ministry in Ireland the word 'supervision' is relatively new. At least that is my experience. Yet I am aware that throughout my relatively short number of years in priesthood I have longed for a process or a group where I could reflect about my work and feel supported. Somewhere to talk about the many incidents that are part of priestly ministry and the manner in which I have handled them, a chance to reflect about difficult funerals, how to celebrate liturgy in a meaningful way, what collaborative ministry and leadership mean in the Church today, how to integrate theology and the reality of pastoral life in a parish, a space to be honest about loneliness and low morale and change and their impact on me, and much more, would be invaluable.

When I heard about the Masters Programme in Supervisory Practice at Milltown, I realised that the word supervision named what I had been looking for in my ministry, and what I had found informally in the support and advice of friends and mentors.

I was part of the first group of therapists, spiritual directors and people involved in ministry to complete the Milltown course. The nine modules we completed integrated the academic and experiential, and modelled adult learning very well. So we not only learned about models and tasks and processes of supervision, we also practiced the skills, received and gave individual supervision, and spent much time reflecting in class and in learning logs. As the course developed I began to realise that supervision (and indeed the course itself) was not just a formative, educative and supportive process that aided more professional and accountable ministry but actually a new way of doing ministry, grounded in reflection.

As a result of the course I now have a professional qualification in supervision and meet regularly with a great supervisor.

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